

Books for Holiday Giving

As the youngest of six kids I was terribly spoiled. I mastered the art of whining and conniving which probably explains why I can still “out-pout” my baby who is now 23!

I was also spoiled with books—a very good thing! A child can never have too many books - neither can adults. Since Christmas is only a month away a few book suggestions come to mind that you may wish to spoil a child or adult with.

One Christmas I was given *The Family Under the Bridge* and it became my favorite for quite a while. Written by Natalie Savage Carlson with illustrations by Garth Williams it tells the story of Armand, a Parisian hobo and the three children he “adopts.” Many today will consider the book “politically incorrect” as it deals with child abandonment, among other issues, but who wouldn’t want to live under a bridge in Paris?

But the love Armand develops for the children, scenes with gypsies and Santa Claus and the charming illustrations makes it a good choice for either a read-aloud or to give to a young reader. Published in 1958. it was a Newbery Honor Book in 1959.

A delightful series of books which works well for both children and adults is *The Chronicles of Narnia* by the beloved C.S. Lewis. One reviewer believes the books should be read three times: as a child, a young adult and later in life. Of the seven books in the series *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is the most familiar. Several movie versions exist, the latest being a couple of years ago from Walt Disney. Peopled with fauns, talking beavers, the evil White Witch and the amazing Aslan this tale, and the others in the series, may be read on several levels. I first ventured into Narnia in my early 20’s so I guess it is about time for another voyage into the magical land!

Hobbies, lifestyle choices, stage of life and other areas are good markers for the selection of non-fiction books for an adult or teen. If you are really in a quandary you may always consult best-seller lists or ask a friendly librarian for suggestions!

Books by Indiana authors are always a good choice for gift-giving but don’t limit yourself to the obvious such as James Whitcomb Riley or Gene Stratton Porter. A Kit Ehrman novel would look nifty in a mystery lovers stocking. For the paranormal fan folklorist Wanda Lou Willis writes about *Haunted Hoosier Trails*. Shutterbugs and history devotees will discover hidden Indiana sites in the works of photographer John Bower. His latest book is *After the Harvest: Indiana’s Historic Grain Elevators and Feed Mills*.

The Dangerous Book for Boys might be an option if you are purchasing a book for a guy. Originally published in England in 2006 the “American” version came out this year and is marketed as being for boys from eight to eighty. Written by brothers Hal and Conn Iggulden *Dangerous* covers how to tie knots, fishing, codes, making crystals, how to make a paper hat, a simple electromagnet, how to skip stones and includes adventure stories. *Dangerous* would appear to be a good choice for a dad and his son. Oh, the book also includes information on Girls!

The Daring Book for Girls, published in October, is the perfect mix of girly stuff, practical information and fun. The young lady who receives this as a gift will learn how to make a sit-upon, karate moves, basketball rules, how to press a flower or change a tire and learn about the South Sea Islands, women spies and modern women leaders.

As an extra you may want to include book plates with your gifts. Did you have those as a child? I recall proudly placing a plate in each new book and writing my name (my penmanship was more legible back then!) on it. Every now and then we run across books with plates in our donated books. Makes you wonder about the journey the book has taken and the person who proudly wrote their name on the book plate.

Happy Book Giving!

Mary Clare Speckner is a Reference Librarian at Bartholomew County Public Library